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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y -- ADDED NOFORN HANDLING

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TAGS: [IZ](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: AMB, CG AND PM DISCUSS UPCOMING VISIT, SYRIA AND
NATO

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Classified By: Ambassador Christopher R. Hill for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S/NF) Summary: In their regular weekly meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on July 16, the Ambassador and MNF-I Commanding General (CG) Odierno discussed the PM's upcoming visit to Washington, the NATO agreement and foreign fighters crossing the border into Iraq from Syria. In response to Ambassador's question about the focus of his visit, the PM stated that launching the Security Framework Agreement⁸ would be the main goal. Maliki stressed the importance of building the foundation to sustain the bilateral relationship in the future⁸ and said that his visit would focus mainly on the economic aspects of the SFA. Maliki discussed reports of 32 suicide bombers enroute to Iraq via the Syrian border in coming days. He intends to summon the Syrian Ambassador to share the information and warned of a potential deterioration of the Iraq/Syria bilateral relationship. The PM bemoaned the Syrian government's facilitation of foreign fighters crossing the border and claimed that he is aware of the Syrian's ambitions to reinstall a Ba'athist regime in Iraq in order to have control of Iraqi oil. The CG expressed concern about changes being made to the NATO agreement and warned of the potential for NATO training forces being withdrawn if the agreement was not passed quickly. Maliki promised to push the agreement through the Cabinet on July 19 but predicted that passage through the CoR would be difficult. End summary.

VISIT TO WASHINGTON: LAUNCHING THE SFA

12. (S/NF) During their last meeting before PM Maliki's visit to Washington, the Ambassador asked the PM what he viewed as the primary objective. Maliki responded that launching the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA)⁸ would be the focal point of his visit. The PM stated that now was the time for the U.S. and Iraq to start building the foundation that would sustain the bilateral relationship in the future.⁸ Under the umbrella of the SFA, economics would be his focus for this trip and setting the basis for cooperation on activities like an investment conference in the fall is one of his primary goals Maliki said. The PM referred to the Ministers of Defense and Interior who will travel with him, and said that during their meeting with the Secretary of Defense they will present security and military-related requests (such as fighter jets, navy patrol vessels and other military equipment), but that meeting would be secondary to his overall goal of advancing the SFA and setting the foundation for long-term ties.
FOREIGN FIGHTERS FROM SYRIA

13. (S/NF) The PM discussed reports that 32 suicide bombers

were enroute from Syria to Iraq in the coming days. (The CG confirmed the recent intelligence showing Syrian acquiescence to foreign fighter flows). Maliki declared &I am going to summon the Syrian Ambassador and hand over the information we have, this may lead to deterioration of our bilateral relationship.⁸ The PM bemoaned the Syrian government's facilitation of foreign fighters crossing the border into Iraq. He stated &I have full details of the Syria's ambitions in Iraq, they want to see the re-emergence of a Ba'athist regime so that they can control Iraqi oil.⁸ Describing the Syrian government's engagement as &lies and disguise⁸ (saying one thing and then doing another), the PM Qdisguise⁸ (saying one thing and then doing another), the PM said the overall goal was to make it appear that the GOI had failed in order for the Ba'athist party to win 30 percent of the seats in the CoR during the national elections. The CG assured that Coalition Forces would continue to share intelligence and help the Iraqi Security Forces in stemming the flow of foreign fighters crossing the border. Maliki concluded the discussion by saying &These things happen, what is important is that we know about them. We never expected things to be easy.⁸ (Note: Maliki has for years bemoaned Damascus' acquiescence (at best) or active facilitation (at worst) to remnants of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party, hosting and protecting its former leaders and primary financiers. He believes Damascus seeks to take focus off that primary issue, by emphasizing Iraq-Syrian border security, when the real issue, to Maliki, is the Assad regime and its intentions to keep Iraq weak, violent, and fractured, paving the way for a return of the Ba'ath. End Note.)

CHANGES TO NATO LTA

14. (S/NF) Turning to the NATO long-term agreement (LTA), the CG expressed concern over changes that were being made to the LTA by the Council of Ministers (CoM). The CG warned that if significant changes were made, it would require the LTA be

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sent back to NATO headquarters for internal re-approval of the agreement which could take months. The CG emphasized to the PM that if that were to happen, it would be highly likely that the NATO Training Mission forces currently in Iraq would be withdrawn. The PM pledged that he would push for the passage of the LTA through the Cabinet on July 19 and underscored his desire to keep the NATO forces in Iraq. After that, he said, he would work to see it passed in the Council of Representatives (CoR). The PM predicted the difficulty of passing the LTA through the CoR and lamented that anything originating from the government was always automatically rejected. The CG opined that due to rampant absenteeism in the CoR, a small group was allowed to control what happens in the CoR due to the constant lack of a quorum.

The PM replied that &The CoR is a problem, but what can I do? This is democracy.⁸ Likewise, Ambassador and CG noted importance to the U.S. of CoR rapid conclusion of the third and final reading of the UK bilateral security agreement. PM Maliki generally reflected a commitment to keep it under consideration in the CoR, acknowledging that absenteeism left the agreement in limbo several times in the face of Sadrist bloc walkouts depriving the CoR of a quorum. He saw the July CoR session as the agreements next chance to pass.

KURD-ARAB TENSIONS

15. (S/NF) (Note: This discussion is from the meeting between the Ambassador, CG and PM on July 9. End note.) PM Maliki was keen to discuss Kurd-Arab tensions and sought a readout of AMB Hill's just-completed visit to Erbil. (The Ambassador visited Erbil July 6-7 to reinforce VP Biden's message to Barzani to delay the proposed KRG constitutional referendum.) Maliki said that he had appreciated VP Biden's readout to him of his earlier discussion with Barzani. Maliki welcomed AMB Hill's

confirmation that the KRG Parliament would postpone the referendum. (Maliki considered the referendum an ill-conceived Barzani gambit to undercut the DIBS process with Kurdish electoral facts on the ground.) Maliki, however, was not sanguine that the root causes of the core Kurd-Arab dispute had been allayed in any way. Maliki further feared that the KRG constitutional draft, even if now placed aside, might lead to a broadening of the rift between the two peoples Kurd and Arab which before always had been between the government in Baghdad and the Kurds. Other regions might get involved now, he added, the Kurds don't understand this. It is not just about them and they are not reading the situation right. PM Maliki added that it was helpful that the Kurds had not embraced what he described as a Saudi effort to build a Sunni-Kurd front against the Shi'a in Iraq. He said that renewal of sectarian alliances along these lines would be disastrous for Iraq - making Iraq no different than Lebanon, with competing identity-based groups, supported by hostile outside actors.

¶6. (S/NF) AMB Hill said that the postponement gave the issue time to be re-focused within DIBS channels and could help alleviate the tense atmosphere which had arisen in recent days. In this light, the PM welcomed the upcoming arrival of newly-announced UN SRSG Ad Melkert, who, as a non-Muslim and non-Arab, fit Maliki's specific formula to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon for a potentially successful successor to Steffan de Mistura.

¶7. (S/NF) AMB Hill twice urged Maliki to get off the sidelines and use the opportunity of the anticipated Qsidelines and use the opportunity of the anticipated postponement announcement to re-build a dialogue directly with Barzani to explore a way ahead on the DIBS issues. Maliki said that the government would play its appropriate part in engaging on the DIBS process. He averred that he had a long-standing positive personal relationship with both Barzani and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, labeling the latter flexible and open to talking. Maliki described Barzani as "an old friend", who he had known for 30 years. He described how he had also been a peshmerga in the mountains with the Kurds. However, he acknowledged that nowadays they were not "on the best of terms." Maliki demurred, however, when the AMB suggested a personal note to Barzani to move through the psychological barriers currently blocking constructive dialogue on the thorny Kurd-Arab disputes. Maliki also lamented that discussions of his possible first trip to the KRG, under consideration before the referendum issue arose, now had been postponed at Kurdish request. AMB Hill said that the period following the July 25 KRG Parliamentary elections might be another opportunity to reconsider such a PM visit, after the groundwork is set.

¶8. (S/NF) Additionally, the threemen recounted a series of attacks in northern Iraq and Kirkuk, discussing likely

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Ba'athist, Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi and AQI efforts to test Iraqi security forces in Mosul and Nineveh province. PM Maliki flatly said that the GoI's security forces would not be allowed to fail in the face of this insurgent offensive. CG Odierno reiterated that U.S. forces stood ready to assist the ISF in its counterinsurgency efforts.

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